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SUBJECT: MEDIA REACTION: ARAB SUMMIT

11. SUMMARY:

Columnists in U.A.E. Arabic dailies generally considered the Arab Summit as a success because the Arab leaders managed to meet despite recommendations to boycott it. This was explicitly highlighted by one columnist in Al-Khaleej who deemed the summit was a major step forward. In a more sarcastic piece, a Lebanese writer in Al-Khaleej wondered why the American agenda was absent during the summit and found the summit to be a success in that it did not fulfill Washington's hopes for its failure. Also, in Al-Khaleej, a columnist shed light on the fact that Americans historically wanted to prevent Arab, and stated the American slogan for Arab nations is "partition is the solution."

One columnist in "Al-Bayan" bashed American officials for promoting the boycott of the Arab summit to some Arab leaders while at the same time having their American armies kill Iraqis, Afghanis and Palestinians.

On the issue of the U.A.E. occupied islands, a U.A.E. columnist in Al-Ittihad noted that Qadhafi's speech did not appeal to the Arab audience. Qadhafi was perceived as clearly flirting with Iran when he implied that 80% of the Gulf state's inhabitants whom have Iranian roots.

Interestingly, a Qatari writer in Al-Bayan downplayed the use of Arab summits, reasoning that they were not able to solve even the smallest Arab problem. He ridiculed a Syrian Mufti who issued a fatwa stating that every Arab leader is obliged to attend the Damascus summit lest the leader be sinful. End Summary.

12. Under the headline "What comes after the summit?" columnist, Jaafar Mohammed Ahmed, wrote 04/01 in "Al-Khaleej" (circulation 90,000):

"Some observers focused on the positive elements of the Arab summit while others focused on the negative ones. However, the fact that the summit was convened at the scheduled time and place is a success in itself. Summit participants agreed that Arab multilateral relations were not strong and are passing through a difficult period. We hope the Damascus summit will be a major step forward in activating its resolutions, working toward overcoming internal Arab disputes and deterring foreign interventions that aim at intensifying Arab problems."

¶3. Under the headline "Who was the biggest absentee in Damascus summit?," Lebanese writer, Saad Mehio, wrote 03/26 in "Al-Khaleej":

"Did we notice something that did not happen in the Damascus summit? The American agenda was absent, in contrast to previous Arab summits. Palestine became the summit's main issue instead of Iran, the Arab peace initiative with Israel is no longer proposed without conditions, and the summit succeeded in preventing the Lebanese crisis from blowing up the summit, as Washington hoped and aspired for."

¶4. Under the headline "Why isolate Syria?", a columnist, Ahmed Omarabi wrote 03/31 in Dubai-based Arabic daily "Al-Bayan" (circulation 85,000):

"Why does America want to regionally isolate Syria and politically besiege it? Answer: Syria is Iran's ally and Iran is the biggest supporter of the Lebanese armed resistance [Hizballah], providing it with money and weapons, and Hezbollah threatens Israel's security."

"How do we perceive the alliance of an Arab country [possibly Saudi Arabia] with America and Israel against this Lebanese armed resistance [Hizballah], taking a hostile position against Iran that supports this resistance and then expanding on this and going against Syria for its alliance with Iran in support of the Lebanese resistance?"

"Arab countries should support resistance against Israeli occupation, such as Hezbollah and Hamas, or at least take a neutral position. But to form an alliance with America - the greatest

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strategic partner of Israel - against Arab resistance is something unacceptable."

¶5. Under the headline "Americans and the Arab Summit's agenda", Dr. Mohammed Al-Saeed Idris, wrote 03/26 in "Al-Khaleej":

"Americans have worked since WWII to prevent unity in the Arab nation. They seek to abort the Arab League. Perhaps the American refusal to sign a collective free trade agreement with the GCC is an evidence of this."

"The American slogan for Arab nations is 'partition is the solution'; [it is] like the English one, 'divide and conquer'. The United States is the basic force behind the Lebanese crisis, [but] America wants us to think that Syria is the main hurdle in Lebanon. Likewise, regarding Iraq, where [they claim] Iran should be considered the main problem. What America really wants is for Arabs to ignore the American occupation of Iraq and the American scheme in Lebanon."

¶6. Under the headline "Arab nationalism in Washington's range", Bassil Abu Hamda, wrote 03/31 in Dubai-based Arabic daily "Al-Bayan":

"Are not some American officials, like Dick Cheney and others, ashamed of inciting several Arab countries to boycott a summit whose only weapon was words, dialogue and understanding, while American armies are pouring rockets and missiles down on innocent citizens in Iraq, Palestine, Afghanistan and other parts of the world?"

¶7. A last-page column in Al-Ittihad 3/31 entitled "Al-Qadhafi's political flirting" by UAE columnist Nasir Al-Dhahiri read:

"Arab audiences trust Qadhafi's wide knowledge and awareness of Arabs' situation, but this audience lately did not like what he suggested in his speech: resolving the UAE islands issue through an international court, because it is not in the Arabs' interest to be Iran's enemies just for some islands [claimed by] some Gulf countries, 80% of whose inhabitants have Iranian roots!"

"Neither side can take this initiative seriously. We do not know what is misleading research centers or even pro-Iranian organizations Qadhafi relied on for his assumption that 80% of Gulf inhabitants have Iranian origins."

"What political flirting is Qadhafi doing with Iran at the expense of a national issue [UAE's islands]?"

18. Under the headline "Issuing Fatwas to serve Damascus summit... Why?", atari writer, Dr. Abdul Hamid Al-Ansari, wrote in his op-ed in "Al-Bayan":

"General Syrian Mufti Sheikh Ahmed Hassoun issued a fatwa stating that every Arab leader is obliged to attend the Damascus summit unless has a medical excuse, or he will be sinful; no leader should send someone to represent him."

"Why do we need such weird fatwas and threatening religious statements? Why do we embarrass our leaders with such religious fatwas? Do such fatwas further Arab interests or Arab solidarity? Don't these fatwas offend the religion itself and the status of religious fatwas in the eyes of the Islamic audience? Don't these fatwas offend the status of the Sheikhs and the Islamic scholars [who issue them] especially after hearing that these scholars issue their fatwas according to political instructions they receive from the government? Using religion to serve politics is a dangerous thing."

"These sheikhs propelled our youth to go to Iraq and fight the American occupier. These youth were later killed in Iraq and today these Sheikhs exempt themselves from their fatwas. These Sheikhs are the greatest sinners. This case resembles the religious situation that spread in Europe during the medieval ages under the hegemony of the church and its control in the lives of the Europeans."

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"The Damascus Summit does not need statements or fatwas condemning leaders; it is just an Arab summit like other previous summits that were not able to solve the smallest Arab problem. The problem is not in the summit; it is in the flawed Arab political body, with the exception of the Gulf, the only healthy part of the body."

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